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SUBJECT: DEWEY BEATS TRUMAN! INCUMBENT BASESCU DEFIES EXIT POLLS  
AND WINS RE-ELECTION

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REF. BUCHAREST 809 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Defying pre-election surveys and most exit polls, incumbent Traian Basescu has won re-election in a hotly contested campaign. Against expectations, turnout in the runoff was very high, beating the first round by almost five points. Though there were no systematic problems, minor electoral incidents were reported nationwide. Print and electronic media continued to race for the bottom with clear bias and lack of professionalism. After prematurely claiming victory, Geoana's team is now suggesting it may file formal claims of electoral fraud against Basescu. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Following an extremely close and at times vicious campaign, incumbent Traian Basescu now seems certain to have won the December 6 presidential runoff with a margin of 0.7 percent or about 70,000 votes. With 99.13 percent of precincts reporting as of 11:00 am on December 7, The Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) reported 50.37% for Basescu and 49.63% for challenger Mircea Geoana of the Social Democratic Party (PSD). With only some 90,000 votes to go, it seems almost impossible that Geoana could close the gap.

¶3. (U) Turnout reached 58%, with 10.23 million casting ballots out of 17.65 million eligible voters. Contrary to expectations, this was significantly higher than the 53.5% turnout in the November 22 first round of elections. It was the first time in the post-Communist era that turnout in the runoff had exceeded that in the first round, and the first time Romanians re-elected a sitting president. Voting was generally peaceful, although TV stations carried images throughout the day of jammed polling places and minor altercations between voters or with police and election officials.

¶4. (U) Exit polls released as the polls closed at 9:00 pm on election night had shown Geoana in the lead, with the four major polling firms (all with ties to PSD) giving him between 50 and 51.6 percent. By the time all four firms had released their final exit poll figures at 11:30 pm that margin had shrunk by approximately 0.4% across the board. The CSOP poll actually showed Basescu leading by 50.4% vs. 49.6%. At least one Bucharest daily actually went to press overnight with headlines that Geoana had won, but most papers simply reported that he was leading the polls.

¶5. (U) According to media reports, Basescu picked up most of the votes which had gone to the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) in the first round, as well as nearly 60% of those who had not voted in the first round. Geoana won a majority of those voting previously for Crin Antonescu of the National Liberals (PNL), as well as independent candidate Sorin Oprescu and ultraconservative nationalist Corneliu Vadim Tudor.

¶6. (U) There were a number of minor electoral irregularities around the country, but no evidence of any systematic fraud. The national police reported 55 investigations related to the election, in which 33 individuals were fined. Most involved attempted double voting or simple drunk and disorderly behavior. Several polling places were

closed temporarily over allegations that election officials themselves had voted multiple times, and a small number of precincts ran out of ballots.

¶17. (U) Regionally, Basescu scored best in Transylvania and western Romania, cresting at over 60% in Cluj and several other cities with large Hungarian populations. Geoana did similarly well in the more rural southern and eastern parts of Romania, but his margins were lower in the urban areas that he did win. Geoana seems to have won the city of Bucharest by barely one percentage point.

¶18. (U) On December 5 and 6 electronic media continued to violate the statutory blackout on political activities immediately prior to and during the election, and the National Audiovisual Council's (CNA) response was ineffective. A number of TV stations broadcast footage December 5 of alleged campaign bribery by Basescu supporters. On election day several TV stations - including the primary public station TVR1 - aired commentary throughout the day with commentators explicitly criticizing Basescu, while at least two TV station websites published preliminary results before the polls closed at 9:00 pm. Many stations projected that Geoana had won based only on local exit polls, without waiting for official results. In one case, CNA was unable to stop the on-air violations because some council members were not available to vote on taking action. CNA did manage to gain a quorum to impose sanctions on Radio Romania Actualitati (national public radio) for broadcasts that urged support for Geoana. The station claimed that its broadcast had been pirated with this segment, and an investigation is underway.

¶19. (SBU) COMMENT. Election night itself was somewhat bizarre. Despite the closeness of ultimately inaccurate exit polls showing his victory (the highest margin being 51.6% to 48.4%), Geoana chose to declare victory only minutes after the polls closed. Basescu soon followed suit claiming he had won, though in a somewhat less ostentatious manner. The BEC will make its next announcement at

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2:00 pm local time (7:00 am EST), though it is not clear whether it will actually certify Basescu's victory at that time. It is an open question whether potential Geoana appeals or fraud charges will delay the final outcome.

GITENSTEIN